

English Translation Strategies of Public signs in Scenic Spots from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

Gaili Wang

Shaanxi Fashion Engineering University, China

Keywords: public signs in scenic spots; English translation strategies; adaptive selection; Eco-Translatology

Abstract: In the context of globalization, the links around the world are getting closer and closer, and there are more and more tourists and business people coming to China. Whether the translation of public signs in scenic spots into English is harmonious and unified has a great influence on cross-cultural communication. Public signs in scenic spot play an indispensable role in daily life. The correct English translation provides convenience for the travel of the vast number of international tourists, sets up a platform for local residents to learn English, and also contributes to the construction of urban language ecological environment. There are still a few studies on the translation of public signs in scenic spots from an ecological perspective in China. Taking the English translation of public signs in scenic spots in Xi'an as an example, this paper probes into the translation of public signs from the perspective of Eco-translatology, and the present situation of English translation of public signs in scenic spots in China and its communicative translation strategies.

Public signs refer to any written language used in public for certain communicative purpose[1]. Public signs are widely used mainly for the function of prompt, notice, warning, indication and so on. Under the ecological environment of global integration, the economic development is booming, the international and domestic tourism upsurge is set off, the world population flows freely in a wide range, and the cultures of different countries blend and collide with each other. Language is the carrier of culture. Translation builds a bridge for the exchange of cultures between different languages. The three complement each other and are indispensable. Therefore, with the rapid development of tourism, there are millions of people come to China to travel. The translation of public signs in scenic spots provides foreign guests with convenience, sets up a platform for local residents to learn English, and also contributes to the construction of urban language ecological environment. In recent years, the research focusing on ecological translation is growing year by year. The English translation of public signs in scenic spots is not only one of the bearers of culture, but also affects the understanding of foreign tourists. It involves the shaping of the international image of the city and its overall cultural propaganda effect. Based on the translator's adaptive selection theory in ecological translation, this paper introduces the concepts of ecological translation and multi-dimensional adaptive selection into the study of English translation of public signs in scenic spots, to provide a different perspective for analyzing the present situation of English translation of subway public signs in scenic spots and communicative translation strategies.

1. An Analysis of the Connotation of the “adaptive selection” of Eco-Translatology

1.1 Eco-Translatology

Eco-Translatology originated from the British biologist Darwin's the natural law “Natural selection and survival of the fittest”. It is a subject that the ecology and the translation study cross each other. The theory of ecological translation is first presented by Professor Hu Hepburn of Tsinghua University in 2004 in his Translation as Adaptation and Selection.[2] From his perspective, translation is a translator's adaptation and selection activity in a translation eco-environment. According to the theory of Eco-Translatology, translation is defined as “translator's behavior of

adaptation and choice with the translator as the leading, the text as the base and cross-cultural information transformation as the purpose”.[3]

It studied the main body, the basic principle, the method and the evaluation standard of the translation in detail. Now, the term “ecology” in the field of humanities and social scientific research has become the pronoun of natural health, ecological balance and “harmonious symbiosis” and has also become a global topic. The basic connotation of Eco-Translation is the same as that of the ancient Chinese “unity of natural and man, and people-oriented”. Translator has become the focus of the translation again, which is the dynamic balance of the harmonious unification and the overall ecological environment of the translator in the process of the three-dimensional transformation of language, culture and communication.

1.2 The theory of translation as Adaptation and Selection

“Translation is adaptation and selection”.[4] Translation as Adaptation and Selection is the basic principle of Eco-translatology. Professor Hu Gengshen defines translation as “translator’s selection to adapt to the translation ecological environment” from the perspective of translator[5]. Translation adaptation choice theory is a new translator-centered translation view, which places the translator in the central position of translation activities, focuses on the translator and pays attention to the translator’s feelings. “Translation ecological environment” refers to the world formed by the original text, the source language, the target language and the target language text, that is, language, communication, culture, society, and the author, translator, reader, etc.[6] The basic principle of translation as Adaptation and Selection is “multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive choice”, that is the adaptive selection and transformation of language dimension, culture dimension and communication dimension, requiring translators to make an adaptive choice in different levels of translation ecology. In the process of translation, the translator, as the subject of translation, should give full play to his subjective initiative. He should not only choose in the process of translation, but also adapt to the ecological environment based on language, culture, society and human beings, and strive to build a bridge between the original author and the reader so as to achieve the dynamic balance of the translation ecosystem.

Taking the English translation of Chinese public signs in scenic spots as example, in order to achieve the same communicative effect, we should start with language form, content expression, cultural transmission and communicative function, adapt to the choice in many dimensions, “consider whether the English translation of public signs is close to the foreign audiences’ thinking mode of, cultural customs and social psychology, and whether the communicative intention of the target language readers has been realized in the target language”[7], and screen out the most appropriate translation text.

Public signs play an irreplaceable role in the social daily life and production. From the point of view of Eco-translation, the society in which public signs are translated into English is “translation ecological environment”. Under such social environment, translators should consider the interference to the translation of public signs, make adaptive selection and transform from the dimensions of language, culture and communication, adapt the method of “survival of the fittest” to select the translation until the emergence translations that meet the expectations of both source and target language readers.

2. Translator’s adaptive selection in translation of public signs in scenic spots

2.1 Translator’s adaptive selection to language dimension

Due to the great difference in expression and meaning between English and Chinese, in the process of translation, the translator adapts to the principle of accuracy and readability at the linguistic level, ensures that the target text conforms to the target language habits, and realizes the pragmatic equivalence between the source language reader and the target language reader at the language level. There are many forms of Chinglish expression in Xi’an tourism public signs, resulting in pragmatic errors, such as “TO TAKE NOTICE OF SAFE, THE SLIPPERY ARE VERY

CRAFTY”. It does not meet the standard of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance”. “CAUTION: SLIPPERY RAMP” is the more acceptable.

2.2 Translator’s adaptive selection to the cultural dimension

Language and the culture it carries complement each other. Translation seems to be the transformation from one language to another, but it is the exchange and communication between the two cultures carried by these two languages. The translator should understand the ecological environment of the source language and the target language, and take the target language reader as the center, cleverly deal with the cultural differences[8] to realize the harmonious unity of language and culture.

Many of the names of Xi’an tourism attractions are standard construction with regional historical and cultural connotation, such as “ZHONG LOU (Bell Tower)”, “DA MING GONG (Daming Palace)”, “DA YAN TA (Big Wild Goose Pagoda)” and so on. As far as these scenic spots’ names, which have long been accepted in the world, the complete Chinese phonology can not reflect their historical and cultural characteristics, can not attract foreign tourists to visit, and can not effectively spread Chinese history and culture. It is suggested to follow the international usage: “Bell Tower”, “Daming Palace”, and “Wild Goose Pagoda”. This is conducive to the cultural exchanges between China and western countries and makes foreign friends feel the cultural heritage of the historic city of xi’an. The translator adapts to the international translation method, chooses the internationally recognized expression mode, and avoids the cultural barriers in the communication between the two sides. In addition, there is such a sentence in the tourism text about Hua Qingchi: “Inside the HuaQingchi Spring, there is a bathing pool called Kueifeichi which is said to have been the bathing place of Yang Kuerfei.” “Yang Kuerfei” is a household name for the Chinese, is meaningless for foreign tourists who do not know much about Chinese culture. It is suggested that the necessary background knowledge be added to the translation, such as Yang Kuerfei (one of the four most beautiful ladies in ancient times and the most beloved concubine of the Tang Emperor Xuan Zong).

2.3 Translator’s adaptive choice to communicative dimension

The readers of the English translation of public signs in scenic spots mostly take English as their mother tongue or the second language. In addition to the precise expression of the language form and the accurate communication of the cultural level, the translator needs to consider the communicative purpose of the text and to adapt to the choice of the communication level. For example, an indoor tour route at a famous buddhist tourist site in Xi’an reads “Visit in Civilization, Pay Attention to Hygiene.” the translation is neither syntactically correct nor psychologically acceptable to the recipient. The word “civilization” has a very broad meaning in Chinese, and it’s obviously too big to use it here. “Pay attention to hygiene” also means “keep clean”. The fundamental purpose of translating tourism public signs into English is to facilitate foreign tourists, so the translation should be concise, accurate and avoid misnomers, which may cause misunderstanding. So it is better to translate the sign as “Civilized Visit; Keep Clean!” And on the wall of the south gate of Xi’an City, there is a sign introducing Jianguomen, and the translation of Jianguomen is: Jianguo Gate (Jianguo means to establish a new country).. Here, the translator makes up for the lack of background information about the establishment of New China by adding words and explains the historical significance of the name “Jianguo Men”.

3. Principles and Strategies of English Translation of Public signs in scenic spots adapted to the ecological environment

3.1 The principle of translation

Tourism public signs in English and Chinese can be regarded as elements in the ecological environment of tourism language. The translation of public signs in scenic spots is the conversion between English and Chinese of the elements in the ecological environment of subway language. The translation of public signs should follow the principle of succinct and easy to understand the

target text, so that English readers can understand the public signs at a glance, and at the same time optimize the ecological environment of urban language and realize the purpose of ecological translation. There are many translators in China. Yan Fu propose the translation standard of “Faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”, Qian Zhongshu is known “taking ‘environment’ as the principle”, and Fu Lei, takes “spirit likeness” as criterion of translation.

It is clear that the principles of translation which are often followed by people are more suitable for literary translation, rather than for the non-literary translation of the applied texts such as the public signs of the tourism attractions. Newmark, a famous American translator, proposed a the binary concept, namely, semantic translation and communicative translation. The semantic translation is intended to accurately translate the original author's meaning in the original text in the context of the language structure and the semantics of the target language[9], and is mainly applicable to the text type of literature, scientific and technical literature, and the like. The purpose of communicative translation is to “try to make the effect of the translation on the reader of the target language the same as the effect of the original on the reader of the source language,”[10] which is suitable for applied texts mainly for communicative purpose. Tourism public signs achieve the purpose of communication, therefore, the principle of communicative translation is applicable to the translation of public signs in scenic spots. In the translation of public signs in scenic spots in Xi'an as an example, there are some problems at present: the name of tourism public signs are completely in Chinese Pinyin and lose the indicating function of public sign; the disunity of the translations of the same public sign in one scenic spot results in the difficulty for readers to understand the target language; and the lack of translation, and the improper use of words and verbatim translation lead to pragmatic errors. Obviously, these problems can be summarized as problems of the transformation of various elements in the translation ecological environment. If there are more problems, the language ecological environment will be seriously destroyed. Thus it can be seen that the English translation of public signs has a long way to go. Translators can follow the principle of satisfying different factors in ecological translation environment and solve different problems intentionally in tourism public sign translation.

3.2 Translation strategies

Public signs are divided into four categories according to their functions: indicative, suggestive, restrictive and mandatory [11]. The main purpose of bilingual prompts of public signs in tourist attractions is to provide information and serve the function of society. Because of the wide application of public signs, only by carefully analyzing and interpreting its linguistic and functional characteristics can we give full play to the role of bilingual public signs. This paper discusses the communicative translation strategies of public signs in scenic spots from three aspects: language, culture and communication.

1) Understand the differences between English and Chinese expressions, and strive to make the translation form simple and easy to understand. Public signs have the characteristics of “simplicity, specification, intertextuality”[12]. Thus the translation of public signs also needs to have the above points. Therefore, when translating public signs, translators should master the differences in expressions between English and Chinese and the characteristics of public signs, and try their best to use common languages such as nouns, verbs, phrases and so on. In English-speaking countries there are many equivalent expressions, such as “No leaning”, “Keep off the Grass”, “Mind Your Step”, etc.

2) Master the cultural differences between English and Chinese and realize the pragmatic equivalence between the source language and the target language.

Jauss, a professor of literature and art at the Constance University in Germany, believes that the core of reception aesthetics is to start from the audience and from acceptance. Acceptance is the process of creating works by the audience's aesthetic experience. The level of expectation is determined by the quality of the translation. From a cultural point of view, English and Chinese belong to different cultural categories. The translation of public signs into English is centered on the culture of the target language. Translators should pay attention to the cultural factors in the process

of bilingual transformation, avoid unnecessary cultural conflicts, and realize the pragmatic equivalence between the source language and the target language. In many scenic spots, the quality of English translation of public signs is generally inconsistent with the expectation level of the audience, resulting in aesthetic distance. Any kind of acceptance failure will lead to the failure of communication. For example, many scenic spots have public signs that read “No Spitting”, “No Public Defecation”, “Don’t Lie Down”, etc. These translations of public signs will also arouse the rebellious psychology of foreign tourists, which is not conducive to enhancing the contextual effect and catering to the psychological expectations of the recipients.

3) Be familiar with the function of public signs and strive for clear and definite purposes of translation communication.

The function of public signs is strong. In the scenic spots, some public signs are indicative, and some are suggestive or warning. Public signs, such as “The grass is smiling at you, please detour” and “The small grass is ashamed to smile, please do not bother it!” are frequently seen on the lawn. Although they are literally equivalent to the Chinese expression of the signs and sounds polite, they cause confusion to many foreigners. According to the principle of motivation in public sign translation, “Keep away from the grass!” is more acceptable. It not only conforms to the standard of translation of public signs, but also conforms to the expression habits of public signs in British and American countries.

4. Conclusion

Influenced by the thinking and culture of the mother tongue, and the lack of understanding of the culture and habits of the translated language, the quality of the translation of the public language in the scenic spots varies. There are great differences in the expression, cultural background and customs between English and Chinese. Translators should pay attention to these differences when making the conversion between the two languages. It is also necessary to consider a variety of external factors, such as client, special text, communicative purpose, etc. The translation of public signs in scenic spots into English should be as free as possible from the interference and restriction of these internal and external factors.

On the basis of harmony and unity between the language and the connotation, considering the ecological environment of translation as a whole, integrating the pragmatic habits and cultural differences between English and Chinese, and considering the pragmatic habits and cultural differences between English and Chinese from many angles, the translation of public signs should conform to the communicative expectations of the target readers, embody the humanistic feelings of Chinese, pay attention to people-oriented, follow the basic principle of “translation as Adaptation and Selection”, to achieve the equivalent transformation of language, culture and communication, the ultimate goal of communication, and to better enhance the image of Xi’an as an international tourist city.

Acknowledgement

Project: Supported by the special research fund of Shaanxi Fashion Engineering University (Grant No.:2019KYR37).

References

- [1] Wen Xin. Translation of public sign[J]. Heilongjiang Science and Technology Information, 2011 (17).
- [2] Guo Lanying. Survival of the fittest: an Ecological Perspective of Translation [D]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Studies University, 2011.
- [3] Hu Gengshen. Ecotranslatology: the Interdisciplinary Integration of Translation Studies [J]. Shanghai Translation, 2009 (2).

- [4] Hu Gengshen. Interpretation of Ecological Translation [J]. Chinese Translation, 2008 (6).
- [5] Hu Gengshen. An introduction to Translation Adaptation Choice Theory from the Perspective of Terminology [J]. Shanghai Translation, 2008 (2).
- [6] Hu G-shen. The Research Focus and the Theoretical Perspective of the Eco-translation Study. Chinese Translation, 2011 (2).
- [7] Zhang Peiqiu. A Study of the Translation of Public Signs from the Perspective of Ecological Translatology [J]. Journal of Zhejiang University of Science and Technology, 2014 (4).
- [8] Yu Zenghuan. On the Principles of Ecological Translation of Public signs[J]. Journal of Hunan Institute of Science and Technology, 2011(32).
- [9] Ding Yuanyuan. Translation Skills in Semantic Translation and Communicative Translation [D].Qufu: Qufu normal University, 2010.
- [10] Gu Xiaoying. On Newmark's Dichotomous Translation: Semantic Translation and Communicative Translation [J]. Journal of Jilin Institute of Education, 2008 (7).
- [11] Lu Hefa. Chinese-English Translation of Public Signs [J]. Translation of Chinese Science and Technology, 2004 (1).
- [12] Luo Xuanmin, Li Tuwang. Reflections on the Translation of Public Signs[J]. Chinese Translation, 2006 (4).